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Lake Michigan is a precious resource worth protecting.

British Petroleum's permit from the U.S. EPA and the Indiana Department of Environmental Management to increase dumping of ammonia and suspended solids at its Whiting, Ind., plant near Chicago unnecessarily threatens the quality of that resource.

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-10th, and his colleagues in Washington, including U.S. Reps. Melissa Bean, D-8th, and Peter Roskam, R-6th, should continue to pressure the agency and the Bush administration to rescind the permit, and state lawmakers should do whatever they can to stir up heat in opposition to the maneuver, as many already have.

The permit would allow BP to dump more than 1,500 pounds of ammonia, a 54 percent increase, and up to 5,000 pounds of suspended solids, a 35 percent increase, into the lake. Company officials claim the increase would allow it to add 80 jobs at the Whiting plant.

But that relatively minor economic benefit is a poor trade off to the potentially harmful impacts on the lake, an asset enjoyed by thousands of residents throughout Cook County and a source of drinking water to millions of Americans.

Though EPA and BP officials contend the dumping would not harm the lake, plenty of environmentalists disagree. Several experts contend the increased dumping of ammonia could cause an increase in algae, which in turn kills fish. The fish kill then contributes to beach closings, which have already plagued many lake-front communities.

The Clean Water Act prohibits a decrease in the water quality of the lake even if dumping levels remain below federal guidelines.

Late last month, Kirk joined 387 of his colleagues in the House on a resolution he co-sponsored condemning the action and calling on the agency to rescind the permit.

Residents should let their elected officials in Washington know they do not want such a precious asset like Lake Michigan sacrificed for a few more jobs and a few more dollars in the pockets of a company that reported a \$22 billion profit last year in its annual report. BP is certainly doing well enough that it could invest in emission control measures that would make the increased dumping unnecessary.